



IOWA

PROFILES IN soil health

Marilyn Geidel
Adair County, Iowa
400 acres
Corn and Soybeans
Cover Crop: Cereal Rye



Cover Crops the Thing to Do.

The more she read about cover crops and soil health, the more Marilyn Geidel became convinced she and her husband Wes should be trying them on their farm. "I have great interest in reading the farm magazines," Marilyn explains. "The more I read, cover crops just seemed like the thing to do. It sounded good to us to build the soil and to prevent erosion on our hills."

Marilyn has done the bookwork for the couple's 400-acre Adair County farm for nearly 50 years, but she's also been involved in family decisions on how the land is being farmed.

"I used to walk beans back in the days we we did that to pull weeds," Marilyn says with a smile. "But more



Marilyn Geidel and NRCS conservationist Alan Lange of Greenfield talk about improving the soil health on her family farm in Adair County.

“recently it’s been more reading and deciding about what to do on the farm than doing it myself.”

Their Adair County farmland is mostly C and D slopes, with mostly Shelby soils. Marilyn estimates 90 percent of the sloping cropland has been terraced, and it’s being farmed with no-till by their son Doug and his three sons, Justin, Brady and Galen. Still, she and Wes look for more protection.

That dedication to land protection may come in part from her late brother and farming partner Robert Stutt, a highly respected Adair County conservation farmer who counseled Marilyn and Wes on conservation through the years. Marilyn and Wes and their family are now involved in taking care of the land Robert owned and farmed, too.

“I have no idea how many miles of terraces there are in all,” Marilyn says. “Bob started us with them. I guess because Bob was so active in conservation, it spilled over into our family, too. He built more than a dozen ponds in his pastures, and put in windbreaks, grassed headlands, and other practices.”

The terraces are one reason for cover crops. “We have farmable terraces, grassed backslope terraces, and narrow base terraces,” Wes says. “The cover crops will help hold more soil in place, and keep the terraces from filling up.”

The Geidels were able to use financial incentives from the NRCS Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) in 2012 to seed their first cover crop. In 2013, the state of Iowa offered an incentive through the Iowa Financial Incentives Program. “The incentives were helpful to us, since we didn’t know if the cover crops would work at first,” Marilyn says. “We feel they have been successful, that we’re getting results, and our grandsons are thinking they’re a good thing to do, too. It will help keep the farm in good order for future generations,” the 85-year-old says.



Marilyn and Wes Geidel (left) talk about their conservation plan and soil health measures with NRCS District Conservationist Alan Lange as their son Doug looks on.

Marilyn and Wes aerial seeded 60 acres of their 150 acres of standing soybeans to a cereal rye cover crop again this past fall, without any financial incentives. They plan to continue with them. Their son Doug also seeded 160 acres of cover crops on the family farm, with goals of preventing soil erosion and holding more nitrogen in the soil for the next year’s crop.

“We like the idea of building our soil’s organic matter,” Marilyn says, “and improving the soil’s health overall. “We didn’t really think about having healthy soil, but that term has been in the magazines quite a bit lately. We went to the Soil Health Day meeting in Greenfield last year to learn more.”

The couple had also attended a cover crops field day sponsored by the Practical Farmers of Iowa about three years ago, where they saw roots of cover crops growing deep into the soil profile in a soil pit.

“Marilyn and Wes have been very pleasant to work with,” says Adair County NRCS District Conservationist Alan Lange of Greenfield. “They’re intelligent and savvy about conservation—I can tell they understand what we’re talking about when we discuss improvements to their resources. There’s no

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Marilyn Geidel, Iowa

doubt about their dedication to taking care of their land and water.”

Lange says most of the Geidels’ land is highly erodible, like much of the county. “It’s productive land, it just needs careful stewardship,” Lange says. “The Geidels have been no-till farmers for more than 20 years. The majority of farmers in this county are no-tillers now, and it’s good to see more and more people turn to cover crops to enhance that practice.”

Marilyn, who retired in 1994 after 33 years as secretary for the superintendent and school board at the Orient-Macksburg schools, likes to keep learning herself. “I guess I’m not afraid to try something new,” she says. “You learn by trying. Even if you fail, it’s a learning experience.”

“There are more women in charge of farms now,” Marilyn says. “I think more women should try these soil health measures. They wouldn’t have to do it alone—there’s a lot of information on cover crops and soil health in the farm magazines and they can get help from the county conservation office, too.”

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